

GEORGE W. SAMSON.

[To accompany Bill H. R. No. 831.]

JUNE 13, 1860.

Mr. DUELL, from the Committee on Revolutionary Claims, made the following

REPORT.

The Committee on Revolutionary Claims, to whom was referred the memorial of George W. Samson, of Homer, in the State of New York, praying remuneration for the services of his father, Captain Simeon Samson, in the revolution, respectfully report :

The papers accompanying the memorial of the petitioner show that Captain Simeon Samson entered the service of the United States as a captain in the navy at the commencement of our revolutionary struggle, and continued in such service until the close of the war, during which time he rendered valuable aid to the suffering colonies. He was peculiarly adapted to the position of a commander in the navy, for, in his youth, he began a seafaring life, and prior to the revolution performed many important voyages in the employment of the merchants of Plymouth, Massachusetts, where he resided.

He was commissioned as a captain in the navy on the 17th day of April, 1776, and appointed to the command of the armed brig Independence, accompanied with orders to "attack, seize, and take the ships and other vessels belonging to the inhabitants of Great Britain on the high seas, and to bring the same into some convenient port in order that the courts may condemn the said captures as lawful prizes."

In the "History of Plymouth," by James Thatcher, M. D., we find the following sketch of the life and public services of Captain Samson : "Among the intrepid patriots who distinguished themselves in the naval service during our revolutionary contest was Simeon Samson, esq. * * * At the commencement of the revolutionary war, when a marine force was deemed necessary to protect our commerce from the depredations of the British cruisers he was honored by the provincial congress of Massachusetts with the appointment of the first naval captain in the service of the country. He immediately took the command of the brig Independence, belonging to the colony, and which was built at Kingston under his direction. In this vessel

he was eminently successful, and in one cruise captured and sent in five prizes, among which was the *Roebuck*, Captain White, in the autumn of the year 1776. Immediately after this, he himself was captured by Captain Dawson, of distinguished memory in these seas. Captain Samson did not surrender until an engagement of a character as severe and bloody as perhaps is recorded in the annals of naval warfare. The skill and intrepidity manifested by him was applauded even by his enemies. Had he been sustained by all his men, he would, undoubtedly, have been the conqueror, rather than the vanquished. It is said in the *Gazette* of that period, that he was driven to the awful necessity of running through the body two or three of his men who abandoned their guns in the most trying moment of the conflict. One of these victims was his third lieutenant. Soon after his return from captivity, which was at Fort Cumberland, near Halifax, he was appointed commander of the brig *Hazard*, a public vessel belonging to the State. In this vessel he likewise took several prizes, among which was the ship *Live Oak*. In 1779 he was selected to the command of the ship *Mercury*, built at Plymouth, by Mr. John Peck, for Congress. She was employed to carry despatches to our ministers in France. In this ship he returned from Nantz during the severe winter of 1780. Soon after which he was promoted to the command of the *Mars*, a large ship, likewise belonging to the State, and in this vessel he was employed in the most responsible trust, in carrying despatches, and in one cruise carried out one of our ministers to Europe. The British flag-ship *Trial* was captured by him while in the Warren. At the close of the war he retired, like most of the faithful servants of our country, with a very scanty estate, and a numerous family dependent upon him for support. * * * * Few naval officers stood higher in public estimation, and few citizens were more respected for domestic virtues, hospitality, and generous friendship."

Among the papers submitted to your committee is one containing the orders issued to Captain Samson on his assuming the command of the ship *Mars*, in 1780, by the Provincial Congress, in which he is directed to proceed to Nantz, in the kingdom of France, and on his passage to take, sink, burn, or destroy such of the enemies vessels that might fall in his way; and on his arrival in France "you are to govern yourself and pursue such instructions for your future proceedings as shall be given you by Jonathan Loring Austin, esq., mercantile agent for this State in Europe; and in case of his absence, such as you may receive from the Hon. John Adams, and in his absence, from the Hon. Francis Dana. You have herewith a packet directed to those gentlemen, which you are to forward or carry yourself, as circumstances may make necessary, with the utmost despatch; in case you are so unfortunate as to be taken, you are directed to sink said packet, that it may not fall into the hands of the enemy. * * * You are to be allowed four tons in the ship *Mars* for your privilege, and thirty pounds sterling in France in lieu of primage, and a dollar a day for expenses while there; and you must not by any means take any goods in your cabin, but keep it clear and free from every

encumbrance whatsoever, that the ship may be always ready for action."

In the memoirs of Mrs. John Adams, the name of Captain Samson is mentioned as the bearer of letters from that patriotic lady to her husband in France.

An original letter of instructions from Governor John Hancock to Captain Samson is likewise among the papers submitted to your committee, and is as follows:

"BOSTON, *March 3, 1781.*

"SIR: You will please, immediately on receipt of this, to give the necessary orders that the ship Mars, under your command, be discharged of her cargo with all possible despatch, and that the Mars be fitted for the sea immediately. This you will attend to without loss of time.

"I am, with respect, sir, your most obedient servant,

"JOHN HANCOCK.

"SIMEON SAMSON, Esq.,

"Commanding the ship Mars."

The memory of Captain Samson appears to have been held in grateful remembrance by the citizens of Plymouth, his native town. The sword worn by him during the revolution is preserved in Pilgrim's Hall, and attached to it is a card, with this statement:

"The sword worn by Captain Simeon Samson in the memorable battle with Captain Dawson, of the British navy, in the year 1776. On presenting his sword to his conqueror, Captain Dawson returned it to him, saying, 'The man who will fight so bravely ought always to wear a sword.'"

The proof furnished your committee is entirely satisfactory to show that Captain Samson had the entire confidence of the leaders in our revolutionary struggle, and on account of his prudence and valor was frequently selected by them to perform the most responsible and delicate duties. It is not the purpose of the committee to recite in detail the services performed by Captain Samson during that period of our history which "tried men's souls." Every day, however, magnifies the obligation of this free people to bear suitable testimony to the memory and services of our revolutionary fathers, to whose keeping, in the providence of God, the liberties of the nation were intrusted, and who proved sufficient for the hour.

Captain Samson died in 1789, leaving five children, of whom the petitioner is one, and the only surviving child. The other children released to the petitioner all their claims against the government for the services of the said Captain Samson, and the petitioner is consequently the sole owner of said claim.

It further appears that Captain Samson received no compensation for his services as an officer in the navy of the revolution; but, on the other hand, he advanced for the benefit of the colonies during the war a large sum of money, for which he received, in some instances, continental money, from which he realized nothing whatever.

Almost his entire estate was surrendered for the good of his fellow-countrymen, then fighting for their liberties against their mother country. The case is therefore simply this: Captain Samson served his country faithfully for the period of seven years; expended his private fortune for the benefit of the suffering colonists; and retired, at the close of the war, as his historian declares, "with a very scanty estate, and a numerous family dependent upon him for support."

At the death of Captain Samson he still had in his possession the continental money received from the government, amounting to twenty-two thousand and fifty-nine dollars. Upon the envelope containing the money was found this memorandum, in the handwriting of Captain Samson:

"This paper money is to be kept sacred to the latest posterity, in remembrance of the good it has done towards freeing a brave people from a tyrant king and a ruined nation.

"SIMEON SAMSON."

What higher proof of the disinterested patriotism of Captain Samson could be desired than is furnished by this one act? His descendants have religiously kept his request by retaining among themselves the memento of the past committed to their care.

Your committee are aware that the resolution of the Continental Congress, relative to the payment of military officers, is, in terms, confined to the army. We are unable to perceive any good reason why officers of the navy ought not to be provided for, as well as those of the army. It has always been conceded that the sea service was in itself more perilous than the land service, and, in the event of disaster, beyond the same chances of relief and refuge.

Your committee are impressed with the belief that the government should make some compensation to the heirs of Captain Simeon Samson for the services of their ancestor. Congress has, in several instances, made provision for the officers of our revolutionary navy by private bills. By an act approved May 26, 1830, the proper accounting officer of the Treasury Department was directed to pay John Edgar, an acting captain in the navy during the revolutionary war, the same sum in gross, and the same pay during his life, which captains of the army received under the act approved May 15, 1828.

The pay of a commander in the navy, by the act in force for several years past, is two thousand five hundred dollars per annum. Your committee believe this would be only a fair compensation for the services of Captain Samson during the revolution. They therefore report a bill granting to the petitioner, on account of his father's services, the sum of seven years' pay, at the rate of two thousand five hundred dollars per annum.